

Christian Action Ministry Newsletter

Involving the Christian in Community Action

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Steve Atherton, Esq.

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Editor's Note: This is a two part article. The second part will appear in our Jan-Feb issue.



that [none of its policies] prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in [the Guidelines].” A local school district’s failure to so certify or a fraudulent certification¹ can result in the loss of federal funds and/or other enforcement actions.

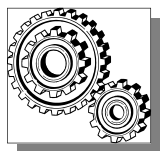
The Guidelines review the current state of the law, as set forth by a multitude of U.S. Supreme Court decisions, before reaching a number of practical, down to earth conclusions that offer real guidance to what students, teachers, parents and schools can and cannot do. As a general rule, the Guidelines draw a clear line between “government speech endorsing religion, which the Establishment Clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses protect.” It then expands upon this concept to make it clear that private religious expression cannot be discriminated against during times and at places where students are permitted to

engage in secular verbal or written expression or hold meetings. The Guidelines apply these principles to certain specific situations as set forth in full hereafter.

Prayer During Non-Instructional Time

“Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. Among other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the

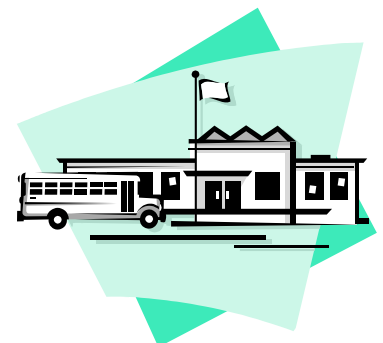
Discriminate against religious expression and you may lose all of your federal educational funds! That is the thrust of the “Guidelines on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” issued by the U.S. Department of Education with the approval of the Department of Justice. Under these guidelines, implemented in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, each local school district in the country “must certify in writing to [its State Department of Education by October 1st of every year]



In the Works

Voter registration Candidate scorecards

Are you interested in becoming involved? CAM is looking for interested and active people to act as liaisons to their church, helping to keep the Christian community informed. Contact CAM at 372-6442.



Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore education should teach the precepts of religion, and the duties of man toward God—Gouverneur Morris

(Continued from page 1)

lunch hour, or other non-instructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities. While school authorities may impose rules of order and pedagogical restrictions on student activities, they may not discriminate against student prayer or religious speech in applying such rules and restrictions.”

Organized Prayer Groups and Activities

“Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs, and “see you at the pole” gatherings before school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activities groups. Such groups must be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is given to other non-curricular groups, without discrimination because of the reli-



gious content of their expression. School authorities possess substantial discretion concerning whether to permit the use of school media for student advertising or announcements

regarding non-curricular activities. However, where student groups that meet for nonreligious activities are permitted to advertise or announce their meetings—for example, by advertising in a student newspaper, making announcements on a student activities bulletin board or public address system, or handing out leaflets—school authorities may not discriminate against groups who meet to pray. School authorities may disclaim sponsorship of non-curricular groups and events, provided they administer such disclaimers in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in prayer or religious speech.”

Teachers, Administrators, and other School Employees

“When acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, teachers, school administrators, and other school employees are prohibited by the Establishment Clause from encouraging or discouraging prayer, and from actively participating in such activity with students. Teachers may, however, take part in religious activities where the overall context makes clear that they are not participating in their official capacities. Before school or during lunch, for example, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or Bible study to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, teachers may

participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies.”



Moments of Silence

“If a school has a “minute of silence” or other quiet periods during the school day, students are free to pray silently, or not to pray, during these periods of time. Teachers and other school employees may neither encourage nor discourage students from praying during such time periods.”

Accommodation of Prayer During Instructional Time

“It has long been established that schools have the discretion to dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction, provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation in such instruction or penalize students for attending or not attending. Similarly,

schools may excuse students from class to remove a significant burden on their religious exercise, where doing so would not impose material burdens on other students. For example, it would be lawful for schools to excuse Muslim students briefly from class to enable them to fulfill their religious obligations to pray during Ramadan.

Where school officials have a practice of excusing students from class on the basis of parents' requests for accommodation of nonreligious needs, religiously motivated requests for excusal may not be accorded less favorable treatment. In addition, in some circumstances, based on federal or state constitutional law or pursuant to state statutes, schools may be required to make accommodations that relieve substantial burdens on students' religious exercise. Schools officials are therefore encouraged to consult with their attorneys regarding such obligations.”

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What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down on profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country.

John Witherspoon

Word Wars Start in Deadly Earnest Over Physician-Assisted Suicide

By
Mark Flemming

Events in Vermont surrounding the emotionally charged issue of Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS) continue to rapidly unfold as political perceptions, professional jurisdictions, and personal perspectives collide. As of press time, the Vermont Medical Society (VMS), the state chapter of the American Medical Association, has just voted (on October 17) to postpone in-person balloting on two resolutions relating to PAS. They also moved to use mail balloting to be sent out by 10/27 to all 1400 VMS members to be tallied by 11/12. The essence of the first resolution is whether the VMS should adopt a more PAS-friendly, so-called "neutral" position. The second resolution regards whether the VMS will return to its 1997 wording of policy that "VMS believes there should be no laws concerning PAS" which is stronger than its current "does not support passage of law for or against PAS" language. The bulk of this second resolution is also a strong endorsement of better end-of-life (also called palliative) care. Gov. Jim Douglas addressed the gathering in Woodstock before the voting took place and said that he does not think that Vermont should legalize assisted suicide. (To borrow a well-worn catch phrase, "Thanks, Jim!")

The VMS holds considerable sway within the state government on medical matters. Gov. Douglas went on to say, "I'm not sure Vermonters are ready collectively to make an informed decision [on PAS]. We'll look to the society for leadership." This vote among the doctors is just the beginning of what will almost certainly be a long and bitter battle as proponents of both sides entrench.



The Vermont Medical Society held physician panel discussions during this past summer in preparation for this vote in Bennington, Brandon, Burlington, Brattleboro, Montpelier, and Springfield to give physicians a chance to hear representatives from both views of the PAS issue. The Vermont Alliance for Ethical Healthcare, the foremost physician-led organization in the state for supporting the best end-of-life care and opposing PAS, supplied a speaker for each of these sessions that were each

attended by 25 to 80 people. Several forums, organized by the Vermont Ecumenical Council, have been scheduled for the public to become better informed from speakers on both sides of the issue before the legislature resumes session. They are scheduled for,

2-4 p.m., Nov. 16, St. Michael's College in Colchester,
7-9 p.m., Nov. 17, United Church of Christ in Manchester,
7-9 p.m., Nov. 18, United Methodist Church in Montpelier,
7-9 p.m., Nov. 19, St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Brattleboro.

UVM medical students gave a report at the Woodstock meeting of the opinion survey they did of all VT physicians on PAS. According to Dr. Orr, it was well done, free of bias, and consistent with rigorous research methodology. They mailed 2770 surveys to all physicians licensed in VT (not just the 1400 VMS members), had 561 returned as undeliverable for a total "n" of 2208. They had a 48% response rate which is very good for a survey of this sort (the DWD survey of VMS members got a 16% return, and the VAEH survey 23%). The results:
(a) 38.2% of respondents thought PAS should be legalized
(b) 16% thought it should be made illegal
(c) 26% thought there should

be no law
(d) 15.7% were undecided
Thus 38% of responding VT physicians support legalization of PAS and 42% oppose (b+c).

In other developments, The Death With Dignity (DWD) Vermont pro-PAS group has hired a lobbyist, former state senator Dick McCormick, to manage and direct its efforts to legalize PAS. According to a Burlington Free Press October 17 article, solicitations for DWD funds were sent out to 130,000 Vermonters during the previous week. Recipients included in the mailing were the Vermont Right to Life Committee (VRLC, who stands adamantly opposed to PAS). This prompted the VRLC to ask, "whether the \$50,000 mailing is evidence that out-of-state money is trying to dominate the debate." The national pro-PAS and euthanasia organization called "The Hemlock Society" changed its name this past July, in a politically astute move, to "End-of-Life Choices" with the tag line "Dignity - Compassion - Control." This name change shifts the focus away from an association with death to personal options which appeals to our self-interests.

Mark Flemming is a Board Member of Christian Action Ministry and attends Essex Alliance Church

My Dear Wormwood:

...Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to having a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together in his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily 'true' or 'false' but as 'academic,' or 'practical,' 'outworn' or 'contemporary,' conventional,' or 'ruthless.' Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church...

Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape (C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters—1962)

What can I do?



Faith without works is dead James 2:17

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www.christianaactionministry.com

Become a Notary Public

As we move into the 2004 election cycle, there is a need to register your Christian brothers and sisters as voters. Many have never voted, some have moved and are not registered to vote, and some are going to be eligible to vote for the first time. A Notary Public can register citizens to vote, and an effective place to do it is within your own church.

Contact your County Court and ask for an application to become a Notary Public. It is not difficult to do, and you will be making a difference.

The Vermont Alliance for Ethical Healthcare is leading the battle in Vermont against physician assisted suicide. They need your prayers for wisdom, courage, and grace. If you can financially assist them, it would be a blessing.

To find out more, view their website at www.vaeh.org.

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Next Meetings

November 3, 7:00 pm
Community Bible Church
So. Burlington, Vt.
December 1, 7:00 pm
No. Avenue Alliance Church
Burlington, Vt.

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in
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